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AUTHOR Price, William T., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

A career development conference was targeted to disadvantaged young adults who needed assistance in their transition from school to work. Conference participants were 27 economically disadvantaged clients of an agency in southwestern Virginia partially funded by resources from the Job Training Partnership Act. The conference was designed to meet four primary objectives: develop career decision-making and planning skills, develop job seeking skills, develop job retention skills, and enhance each participant's self-esteem and confidence. The curriculum included self-assessments, career decision making, acquisition of knowledge about careers, job seeking skills, and job retention skills. Benefits were felt to be associated with using a conference setting at a major university, including greater concentration at a site removed from participants' homes, provision of new experiences designed to build social skills and self-esteem, presentation of material in a concentrated amount of time, and creation of a learning climate different from the traditional classroom setting. An informal follow-up survey indicated that a majority of participants obtained employment. All who obtained employment indicated that knowledge and skills gained from the conference helped get them a job. (YLB)

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A Career Development Conference for Disadvantaged Young Adults

A Paper Presented to the Division of Vocational Special Needs American Vocational Association Convention December 6, 1986

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William T. Price, Jr.

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A Career Development Conference for

Disadvantaged Young Adults

There are many factors that have negatively affected the successful transition from school to work for most disadvantaged young adults. Many of these individuals are deficient in basic skill development, lack work experience, lack job-seeking and -keeping skills, and are victims of a breakdown in and fragmentation of social institutions. Furthermore, education's isolation from the workforce and today's highly diverse job market have also led them to their transition problems (Youthwork, Inc., 1982). These problems are illustrated by an unemployment rate for disadvantaged young adults of over 21.7%, a rate that is more than 11% higher than the national average for the total population of the United States (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1985).

It has not been until recent years that the transition of disadvantaged young adults from school to work has surfaced as a major concern among individuals who are fully or partially responsible for facilitating the transition. As an outgrowth of this relatively recent concern, several models have been developed to enhance the transition. Although the models differ slightly, most have two elements in common. These elements include education and successful placement into industry. The education element typically includes basic education as well as vocational and career training. Furthermore, it is assumed that the education is completed in a junior and senior high school setting. The successful industry placement is typically facilitated, at least initially, by an adult in a school setting.

Although the creators of the transition models are to be commended, there still exists for many disadvantaged young adults problems associated with the transition from school to work. For many different reasons, these individuals have not taken advantage of the opportunities provided for them by programs

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that were built on the various models available. What then can be done for individuals who have dropped out of school, drifted from one bad situation to another and then suddenly awaken to realize that there is more to life than what they have been experiencing? What, then, can be done with students who have graduated from high school, do not plan to enter higher education, and have not taken advantage of the vocational education options that were available to them. The remainder of this paper describes a career development conference that was targeted to disadvantaged young adults who needed assistance in their transition from school to work. The conference was held at the Donaldson Brown Center for Continuing Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The paper will focus on describing the conference participants, conference objectives, benefits of a conference setting, the conference curriculum and co-curricular activities, and selected logistical concerns associated with the conference.

Conference Participants

The conference participants were clients of the Mountain Community Action Program, which is located in southwest Virginia. This agency is partially funded by resources from the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA). All the clients that participated in the conference qualified for JTPA resources. Therefore, Mountain Community Action Program utilized JTPA funds to support the conference.

There were 27 individuals that participated in the conference. Twelve of the participants were male and 15 were female. All of the participants were economically and socially disadvantaged, ranging from 16 to 21 years old. Three participants had earned a G.E.D., 14 were high school graduates and 10 were high school dropouts.

As determined by the Mountain Community Action program counselors, the participants lacked sufficient skills relative to career decision-making and

planning as well as job-seeking and job-retention. They also held varying levels of low self-esteem and lacked the confidence necessary for obtaining and maintaining a career.

Conference Objectives

The conference was designed to meet four primary objectives. They were to:

(1) develop career decision-making and planning skills

(2) develop job seeking skills

(3) develop job retention skills

(4) enhance each participants self-esteem and confidence

The objectives were based on the needs of the participants, amount of time allotted for the conference (a one-week period), and the resources that were available for the conference.

Conference Curriculum Overview

The curriculum included discussing the differences between jobs and careers as well as discussing self-assessments and how these assessments can help one in making wise career decisions. The curriculum also included how to acquire knowledge about various careers and how this information can be used to select a career. The participants were also taught job seeking skills, which included how to identify job openings, develop resumes, write letters of application, complete job applications, participate in job interviews, and conduct post-interview activities. Finally, the participants discussed job retention skills as well as how to obtain specific job-related competencies. Figure 1 contains the conference program that was used, which serves as an outline of the conference sessions and special events.

The curriculum was designed to be practical in nature and the methods used for its delivery facilitated maximum participant involvement. Examples of the methods that were used throughout the conference included small group

discussions, administering several self-assessment inventories, field trips (see Figure 2) conducting career analyses, hands on experiences with completing job applications and developing resumes, participating in video-taped mock job interviews with business persons, and follow-up small group sessions with instructors during the evenings.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Insert Figure 2 Here

Many co-curricular activities were also designed and conducted to enhance participant self-esteem and confidence. Examples of these activities included special evening meal functions, a survival obstacle course, many recreational activities, and a closing ceremony at which each participant was awarded a certificate mounted on a walnut plaque.

Conference Setting Benefits

It was felt that there were several benefits associated with using a conference setting at a major university for teaching selected school to work transition skills to disadvantaged young adults. First, requiring the participants to leave their homes enabled them to concentrate more on the material presented throughout the conference. Secondly, the conference setting provided new experiences that were designed to build social skills and self-esteem. Thirdly, the setting allowed for presenting the material in a concentrated amount of time. This helped conference participants to see how the various conference topics related to one another. Finally, the setting created a different learning climate than the traditional classroom seeting.

For many participants, this enhanced their motivation because of their negative experiences associated with school.

Selected Logistical Concerns

When conducting a conference of this length (five entire days) and for this particular clientele, there were several logistical concerns that needed to be considered. A few of these concerns that may be of interest included transportation, lodging arrangements, meals, chaperones, facilities, and instructors.

Transportation. Individual transportation for this particular group presented a slight problem. Furthermore, for some of the individuals that could provide their own transportation, there were no guarantees that they would be present even though they made a commitment to attend. Therefore, the Mountain Community Action Program provided a bus that took the participants to the conference and back home. Riding on the bus was required if someone wanted to attend the conference.

Lodging Arrangements. All participants stayed in a dormitory room on the university campus. Four participants were assigned to each room. It was felt that this would initiate new friendships as well as facilitate the building of the friendships. Furthermore, it enabled participants to experience firsthand what it is like to live on a university campus.

Meals. As discussed earlier, special meal functions were provided throughout the conference. These meals were held in a formal dining room in the continuing education center. The remaining meals were eaten at one of the university dining halls. This further helped participants obtain experience of the university life. It also helped in cutting overall expenses for the conference.

Chaperones. Some of the participants of the conference were minors. This required the use of chaperones. Two Mountain Community Action Program

counselors and one graduate student from Virginia Tech with a counseling background served as chaperones.

Facilities. Because of the nature of the conference, various types of facilities were needed. The university setting provided all of these facilities. The continuing education center provided excellent conference rooms. The library provided resources for career exploration as well as computers for participant use. A multitude of career areas were also available for field trips. Finally the university setting provided a variety of recreational activities.

Instructors. It was felt that in order to truly meet the needs of the participants, a majority of the conference sessions needed to be in a small group setting. Four full-time instructors and several guest speakers were used for this purpose. All of the instructors had a vocational education background with some experience in working with disadvantaged young adults. The instructors were acquired from the Division of Vocational and Technical Education, which is in the College of Education at the university.

Closing Remarks

It should be noted that an informal follow-up survey indicated that a majority of the participants obtained employment after completing the conference; all who obtained employment, indicated that the knowledge and skills they gained from the conference helped get them a job. The majority of participants also indicated they would recommend the conference to a friend.

It should also be noted that the conference staff (planners, instructors, media-support personnel, guest speakers, and secretarial support personnel) all thoroughly enjoyed working with the participants. These participants were extremely receptive to the information and opportunities that were provided for them. They were eager learners and even with an agenda that was quite extensive, they were very attentive throughout the conference. In fact, their

involvement and receptive behavior provided the catalyst for a successful conference.

Figure 1
Program for Career Development Conference

Day and Times	Activities
Sunday	
5:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	Registration
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Dinner Banquet Opening Session & Conference Preview
Monday	
8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.	Get Acquainted Exercise
9:00 a.m. - 9:50 a.m.	Introduction to and Importance of Identifying Values, Abilities, Aptitudes, and Interests
9:50 a.m. - 10:05 a.m.	Break
10:05 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Self Directed Search (Admin. & Discuss)
12:00 noon - 12:45 p.m.	Lunch
12:45 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Field Trips
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Values Inventory (Admin. & Discuss)
7:15 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.	Recreation (With VA Tech Athletes)
9:35 p.m. - 11:45 p.m.	Movie and Refreshments
Tuesday	
8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.	Introduction to Job Seeking Skills
9:00 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.	Locating Job Openings (Video Tape)
9:45 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.	Virginia Employment Commission
10:15 a.m. - 10:20 a.m.	Break
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Developing a Resume
12:00 noon - 12:45 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m. - 2.30 p.m.	Field Trips
3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Job Application
4:30 p.m. - 4:40 p.m.	Break
4:40 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Letter of Application
6:15 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.	Dinner
7:30 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.	Follow-up Sessions (Resume, Letters, Applications)
9:30 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.	Movie and Refreshments
Wednesday	
8:30 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.	Introduction to Job Interview Skills (Video Tape)
9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Job Interview Skills
10:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Positive First Impressions
12:45 p.m. - 1:20 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Field Trips
3:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Introduction to Career Exploration
4:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Career Cluster Concept
4:30 p.m. - 4:40 p.m.	Break
4:40 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Career Information Resources (written and computer)

Figure 1 continued

Figure 1 Continued...

Day and Times	Activities
Wednesday continued...	
6:15 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	Recreation (Survival Obstacle Course)
10:00 p.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Movie and Refreshments
Thursday	
8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.	Introduction to the Day's Activities
8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Career Information Search (University Career Resource Center)
8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Groups 1 and 2
9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Groups 3 and 4
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Groups 5 and 6
10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Groups 7 and 8
10:30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m.	Mock Job Interviews (Video Taped)
10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Group 1
11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Group 2
11:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Group 3
12:00 noon - 12:30 p.m.	Group 4
12:30 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Group 5
1:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Group 6
1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Group 7
2:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Group 8
2:45 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.	Critique Job Interview Tapes (Critique in Groups of Eight)
7:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Dinner Banquet (Special Guests-VA Tech Athletes; Musical Entertainment)
Friday	
8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Goals and Careers (Motivational Speaker)
9:40 a.m. - 10:10 a.m.	Job Retention
10:10 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Training Opportunities-Community Colleges
10:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m. - 11:25 a.m.	Training Opportunities-Community Colleges continued...
11:25 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.	Training Opportunities-Apprenticeship Programs
11:45 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Conference Evaluation
12:15 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Luncheon Award Session

Figure 2

Career Areas Available for Field Trips

Bakery

Building Maintenance

Carpentry

Clerical and Secretarial

Communications Industry

Dairy Farming

Day Care

Electrical and Power Services

Farming (General)

Grounds and Maintenance

Health Care

Hotel and Motel Operations

Mechanical (Automotive)

Printing

Private Security

Public Law Enforcement

Restaurant and Food Service

Retailing

Television Production

Welding and Sheet Metal

Special Note: Special individual arrangements were made, when possible, for participants who were interested in a career that was not related to one of the 20 areas available.

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U. S. Bureau of Census. (1985). Statistical abstract of the United States (105th ed.). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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